

Engraving of Phineas Ball c. 1880
 by Alexander Hay Ritchie (Scottish-American, 1822-1895)
 Boylston Historical Society Museum Collection

Boylston Boy makes Good

A brief look at the life of Phineas Ball

by Carrie Crane

Phineas Ball was born January 18, 1824. He was the first of six children born to Manasseh Sawyer Ball and Clarissa Andrews. The family was living at the homestead of Elijah Ball (See [Early Deeds from the Estate of Elijah Ball](#)), Phineas's grandfather, in what was then known as the East Woods part of Boylston, now the Mile Hill Road, Green and Warren Street area.

Phineas lived at home, and once old enough, he helped on the farm in the summers and attended the Boylston District school in the winter sessions until age of sixteen. The manuscript collection of his papers at the American Antiquarian Society indicate Phineas spent the winter of 1840 learning the skill of surveying from his uncle in Rhode Island, an education that ultimately set the course of his life. At seventeen, he attended two semesters at the Academical boarding school in Berlin, Worcester County, Massachusetts which ended his formal education.

Personal Diary reveals Career Path and Future

In 1846, at the age of 22 years, Phineas moved to Worcester and began, in earnest, a career as a civil engineer. He briefly kept a diary in 1848. The entries were short, barely a sentence in many cases. There was information about the weather - storms, mud and cold -through the winter entries, the arrival of warmer days and bluebirds in the spring entries and complaints about the heat in the summer. We learn a few other interesting things too. He mentions working for the Providence and Worcester Railroad on several occasions. There is mention of work with other area surveyors and he refers to mistakes made and jobs lost.

On January 8th and then again on July 8th, he worked on a survey for John B. Gough, who purchased his Boylston farm, now known as Hillside, in that year. There are several mentions of the evils of vice and an apparent attempt on Phineas's part to control his, perhaps a result of his connection with John B Gough who was a famous temperance orator. He frequently alludes to traveling to Marlboro, MA and while he does not mention any names he does, later that year, marry Sarah Augusta Holyoke of Marlboro. The diary abruptly ends on August 3rd 1848.

Engineering Firm Established and Patent Granted

Over the next decade, Phineas bought a home on Elliot Street in Worcester and began working for the city of Worcester's water commission, where he soon became head commissioner. He went into partnership with Elbridge Boyden in an architectural and civil engineering firm under the name Boyden and Ball. In 1865, he was granted a patent for a tool that improved the tapping of water pipes.

THE VOTE FOR MAYORS SINCE 1857.—For the benefit of persons who may be curious to compare the vote for mayor this year with that of past years, we give the following statement of the vote since 1857:	
Dec. 1857—Isaac Davis.....	1418
P. W. Taft.....	1381
Dec. 1858—A. H. Bullock.....	1665
W. W. Rice.....	1598
Dec. 1859—W. W. Rice.....	1679
D. W. Lincoln.....	865
Dec. 1860—Isaac Davis.....	1648
Geo. M. Rice.....	1472
Dec. 1861—P. Emory Aldrich.....	1711
Isaac Davis.....	1600
Dec. 1862—D. W. Lincoln.....	1247
D. S. Messenger.....	948
Dec. 1863—D. W. Lincoln.....	882
Scattering	7
Dec. 1864—Phineas Ball.....	1664
D. W. Lincoln.....	1598

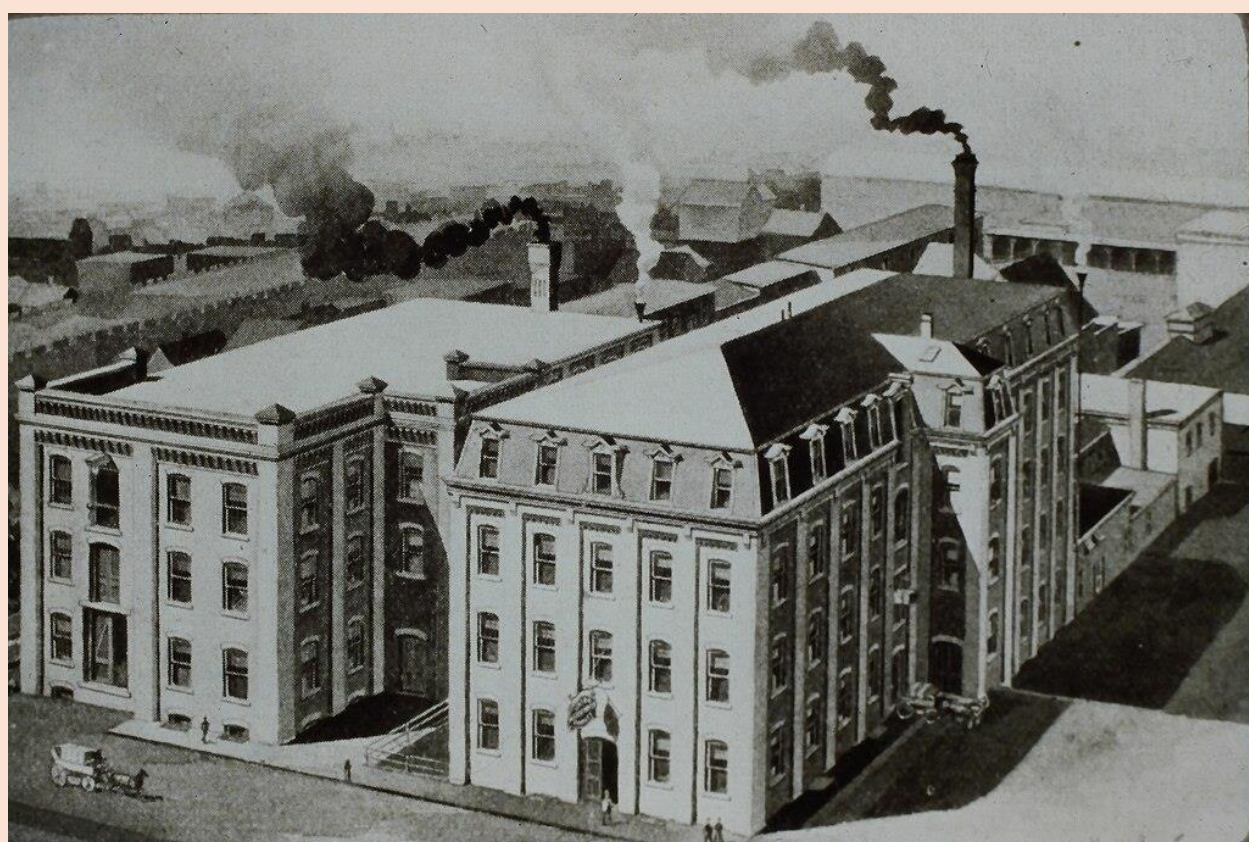
1864 Mayoral election results showing Phineas Ball as victorious.
 Worcester Daily Transcript
 December 10, 1864

Also in 1865, Phineas Ball ran for and was elected Mayor of the city of Worcester. He ran as a republican candidate against the incumbent D. Waldo Lincoln and ran on a platform described as follows in the December 10th 1865 issue of the Worcester Daily Transcript, “in unison with the National and State administration on the great question of the day [alluding to the end of the war between the states]” The platform also included “ a general conviction that something should be

done ...against the illegal traffic in intoxicating drinks.” He won the election with 1664 votes to 1598. Phinehas served as Mayor for a single year and chose not to run for a second term.

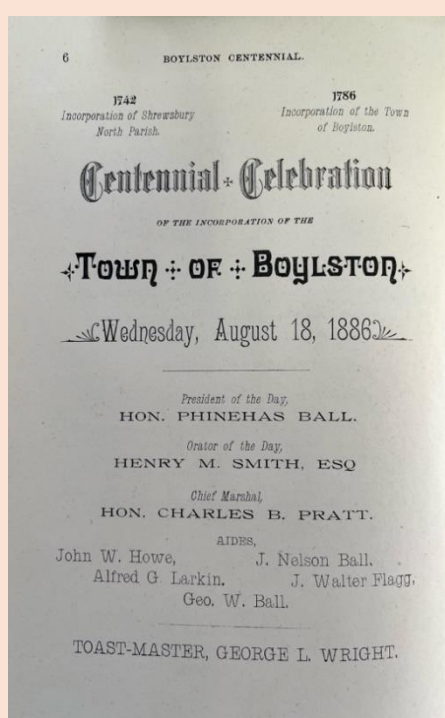
Among other major water projects, he led the planning and construction of the water supply from Lynde Brook in Leicester to Worcester. He continued to serve as city engineer until 1872 and was in charge of many water and sewer improvement projects for the city during his tenure.

In 1869, having received a patent for an improved water meter system, Phinehas Ball and his co-designer, Benejah Fitts, established the Union Water Meter Company. Charging for water usage was critical to covering the cost of bringing water from a distant source to the city home or business, so the company thrived. Fitts soon began the design for a second type of water meter which was added to their product line. Union Water Meter company had sold 31,000 meters by 1890 and remained in business until the 1930s. Phinehas Ball served as the company president until his death in 1894.



Worcester Union Water Meter Company
Hermon Street Worcester MA.
Wikipedia Commons

In 1886, the Town of Boylston was celebrating its Centennial. They invited Phinehas Ball to serve as the President of the Day which was considered a significant honor. He took this titular position seriously, with a note of nostalgia for his old home town and old acquaintances.



Page from the Boylston Centennial Celebration, 1887

One of Phinehas Ball's roles as President of the Day was to introduce the Orator of the Day, Henry M. Smith, Esq. A selection of that introduction follows here:

“We assemble here to-day in obedience to one of the human heart- that of love of home – in response to the tender, the enduring and sacred memory of one's birthplace. For it matters not whether we first saw light and taught to lisp our mother tongue amid the scenery and bloom of a second edition of the Garden of Eden, or in the humble cottage nestling amid the rocks and woods untouched by the hand of man; the warm impulses of our hearts cherish with lasting emotion the vivid recollection of those early scenes, and those of our nearest kindred, who shared and enjoyed and bore with us our early lot. To cease from our ordinary cares and labors, and to bring back memories of these early scenes; to greet again the friends and associates of our youth among the living, or to make up the soul's mementoes of the larger number of early companions and kin among the dead; to renew old friendships, to be introduced to the children and grand-children of the fathers and mothers whom we knew. To these ends let us dedicate and consecrate these few hours.”

Phinehas Ball died on December 19, 1894. He had lived a successful and fruitful life. In his will, the bulk of his estate was left to his wife and daughter. His daughter solely inherited his property in South Bristol, ME. His property in Boylston was left to benefit his brother, Alonzo Ball and nephew Allard Ball, who were still living at the original homestead of Elijah Ball. A smaller portion of his estate was passed to his wife and daughter but directed upon their deaths to revert to the Worcester Polytechnic Institute. He is buried in the Rural Cemetery in Worcester.

Acknowledgements:

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<http://www.waterworkshistory.us/MA/Worcester/>

A Report of a Committee of the City Council on an Additional Supply of Water for the City of Worcester, by Phineas Ball. <http://www.waterworkshistory.us/MA/Worcester/Worcester1863.pdf>

Index of Manuscripts of Phineas Ball, the American Antiquarian Society,
https://www.americanantiquarian.org/Findingaids/phineas_ball.pdf

Marrage record:
<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HY-D14Q-V5D?view=index&personArk=%2Fark%3A%2F61903%2F1%3A1%3AN44W-F28&action=view>

The Worcester of Eighteen Hundred and Ninety, Franklin P Rice, 1899
https://www.google.com/books/edition/Worcester_of_Eighteen_Hundred_and_Ninety/NyPVeB_SwQC?q=&gbpv=1#f=false

Facebook post for the Worcester Historical Society, February 6, 2024
<https://www.facebook.com/worcesterhistory/photos/the-whm-fuller-gallery-redesign-team-needs-your-help-we-are-looking-for-a-union-/933416965456882/>

images:
Worcester Union Water Meter Company
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Union_Water_Meter_Company_\(1898_view\),_Worcester,_MA.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Union_Water_Meter_Company_(1898_view),_Worcester,_MA.jpg)